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GENTILE FORMS OF MILLENNIAL HOPE^{*}

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What is to be the ultimate destiny of the world? This question has always made a powerful appeal to the popular imagination, especially at those periods in history when some shocking calamity has overtaken mankind. Sometimes the shock has been occasioned by dreadful disasters in nature, such as devastating floods, furious storms, or terrifying earthquakes. At other times the imagination has been fired by great social upheavals often accompanied by bloody civil wars or bitter religious persecutions. Again, as in more recent times, attention has been arrested by deadly international conflicts which seemed to threaten with destruction the very foundations of all civilization.

In the presence of such dire calamities many persons lose faith in the permanence of the present world. Horrible outbreaks of distress are taken to be symptomatic of an incurable malady which has fastened its deadly grip upon the present cosmic order. Since the disease seems too deep-seated to be eradicated by remedial measures, its progress can be stayed only by destroying the object upon which it preys. The only hope for a final triumph over evil

is thought to lie in the complete dissolution of the present order of existence and the re-establishment of a new world free from all those calamitous possibilities inherent in the present order of things.

Belief in a violent end of the world is part of a larger circle of ideas representing a thoroughly pessimistic estimate of present conditions. From this point of view life's ills seem too gigantic to be overcome by mere human endeavor, and even with divine aid no gradual process of world-reform can have more than temporary value. To be sure, by invention or discovery the hostile forces of nature may be partially conquered; social conditions may be improved by means of education or by the enactment of laws; and religion may offer its consolations to the oppressed human spirit. But these forms of help are only temporary in character; they give only passing relief to mankind in general, or procure for a few select individuals a way of escape from the ultimate wrack and ruin to which the world is destined. While one may look joyously toward the future for the sudden dawn of a new age, impending doom hangs like a pall over the present age.

^{*} This article is the first chapter in a forthcoming book the purpose of which is to sketch the origins of the millennial type of hope, to note the function which it has served at different times in the past, and in the light of its history to estimate its value as a modern program for the renovation of the world. The book will appear in the autumn of 1917, published by the University of Chicago Press.

History is also interpreted pessimistically by those who look for a catastrophic end of the world. As a whole, the story of man's career upon earth is viewed as one long process of deterioration relieved only here and there by brief spurts in moral and cultural advance. The distant past is idealized as thought turns wistfully backward to an imaginary Golden Age when ideal conditions prevailed in some primeval paradise, or when some heroic figure appeared upon the stage of history partially restoring for a moment the glory of earlier days. But such occurrences are sporadic and anticlimactic; the course of development quickly descends to lower levels and the world as a whole grows constantly worse. Hope lies only in the future, when the idealized past will be restored in heightened splendor. To one who holds these views, as to the contemporaries of King Richard, "past and to come seems best; things present, worst."

The pessimistic view of the world was more common in ancient than it is in modern times. Mythology always glorified the past, or the future, at the expense of the present; and it was to mythology that the ancient man turned most frequently for his philosophy of history and of life. Today a different state of affairs obtains. Modern science reveals a gradual process in the course of the world's development, extending over countless millenniums, and the future career of the physical universe is viewed with an astonishing degree of assurance which provides no place for a cataclysmic end of the world. Similarly students of anthropology, who seek to recover the story of man's career

in prehistoric times, follow his first appearance far back into the shadowy past, but they find no trace of an ideal Golden Age of primitive perfection. All they can discover is one long process of evolving life by which man rises constantly higher in the scale of civilization and attainment, bettering his condition from time to time through his greater skill and industry. Viewed in the long perspective of the ages, man's career has been one of gradual ascent; instead of growing worse, the world is found to be growing constantly better.

Present conditions are also interpreted in a hopeful manner by modern scientific thinking. There is no disposition to ignore the ills of life or to minimize their severity; but instead of men assuming an attitude of passive submission, awaiting the day when all evil is to be destroyed by a cosmic catastrophe, active measures are being taken to accomplish present relief. Disease is to be cured or prevented by the physician's skill; social ills are to be remedied by education and legislation; international disasters are to be averted by establishing new standards and new methods for dealing with the problems involved. In short, the ills of life are to be cured by remedial treatment rather than by catastrophic annihilation. The function of religion in this program is also remedial. Its aim is not merely to extricate individual souls from the débris of a perishing world; its primary task is to stimulate each new generation to the highest possible attainments in moral and religious living.

The optimistic view of human history and life is largely a product of the modern scientific spirit, which applies the teach-

ings of evolution to the interpretation of the world and pictures God's relation to the universe in terms of immanence. On the other hand, the pessimistic view is essentially a heritage from a past age when primitive thinking derived the imagery for its self-expression from that mythological interpretation of the universe which prevailed in pre-scientific times.

I

Within Christianity belief in the temporary character of the present age early assumed a form known as the millennial hope. According to this hope, in the more or less distant future the course of human history is to be suddenly halted by divine intervention when all evil will be abolished and the earth completely renovated. Then God, or Christ,¹ will establish upon a new earth a kingdom of absolute perfection to endure one thousand years; hence the designation "millennial" hope.

Taken in the large, Christian millenarianism is not an isolated phenomenon. While it shows certain very distinctive characteristics, the main problem which it treats and the general type of solution which it proposes are by no means novel. The presence of evil powers in the world has been recognized by practically all peoples even in very elementary stages of cultural development, and the hope of a deliverance to be effected through special divine intervention is not at all unusual in the history of human thinking. This idea was so prominent in the surroundings of the Christians, and their own daily experiences often proved so very dis-

tressing, that they also were impelled to speculate about the end of the present world. In describing this event they employed imagery already current, adding to it certain new features designed to remedy weaknesses in the program of their rivals and to give greater assurances of fulfilment to the distinctively Christian teaching upon this subject. The very attempt to cope with a familiar problem, and the effort to solve it by offering a rival program of the current type, resulted in considerable similarity between the views of Christians and those of their contemporaries.

Familiarity with the world of the early Christians discloses, not only the sources of much of their millennial imagery, but also the secret of its effectiveness. This type of teaching originally received powerful impetus from specific historical circumstances, a knowledge of which is absolutely essential to an understanding of its full meaning and value in the early days of the Christian movement. In later times readers of the Book of Revelation, for example, often found themselves unable to grasp the exact meaning of the author or to appreciate the real service which he originally rendered his contemporaries. This failure was largely due to neglect of the actual historical conditions which called forth the book, and which make perfectly intelligible both its meaning and its value to the particular groups of early Christians whose specific needs prompted its composition. Similarly, in interpreting millenarianism at successive periods in the history of Christianity, account should always be taken

¹ The "premillenarians" place the return of Christ at the beginning of the millennium, while the "post-millenarians" look for his coming at its close.

of the peculiar circumstance which revived these daring flights of the pious imagination; and their worth can be appraised only in relation to contemporary conditions. When removed from their original environment and injected into an alien setting, millennial notions often become meaningless or absurd.

For the content of their millennial hope the early Christians were indebted most immediately to the Jews, but Jewish hopes had been gradually evolving for centuries while the Hebrews were in close contact with a varied gentile environment. Moreover, Christian hopes continued to expand and function anew as the new religion became an independent movement upon gentile soil. Hence acquaintance with Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian, and Graeco-Roman views regarding the ultimate outcome of humanity's struggle with a hostile world is important for the correct interpretation of both Jewish and Christian teaching on this subject.

While occasionally it may become apparent that earlier gentile hopes supplied the stimulus or the model for similar Jewish or Christian beliefs, it is of much greater importance to understand the general conditions in ancient times which made possible the millennial type of speculation and gave it significance for the ancients. If in modern times those conditions no longer prevail, it is not surprising that millennial expectations seem to lose their meaning. But it is all the more necessary that the present-day student make himself familiar with the circumstances of the ancients in order that he may more fully and more correctly appreciate both the origin and the functional significance of

Jewish as well as Christian hopes of the millennial type.

Many gentile peoples of ancient times held definite though varying views regarding the meaning and outcome of humanity's conflict with a hostile world. The emergence of an orderly universe from chaos was often depicted in ancient mythology as the result of a mighty battle between warring deities. These myths reflected in heightened form man's own experiences in his efforts to escape from or to conquer the ruthless powers of nature. He trembled when they displayed their fury in the destructive hurricane, in the blinding lightning, in the deafening thunder, in the terrifying earthquake, or in the devastating flood. Even in the more ordinary experiences of life he often believed himself to be the victim of malevolent powers. Frequently his very existence—to say nothing of his efforts to obtain the luxuries of life—seemed to be threatened by visible and invisible foes.

The issue of life's conflicts was variously conceived, but the hope of some sort of triumph for humanity was practically universal. Ultimate victory was commonly pictured as the work of beneficent deities who intervened in some unusual manner to rescue men from their distresses. Sometimes final deliverance was predicted simply for the individual soul—a deliverance to be realized in a blessed abode beyond the grave. At other times a great hero was brought upon the scene to confer present blessings upon humanity, possibly also pointing the way to a happier destiny in the life to come. Still bolder thinkers prophesied the complete destruction of all evils and the final establishment of a

new and ideal state of existence for restored humanity upon a renovated earth. Amid all these variations in detail there runs the same scarlet thread of hope, more or less clearly discernible everywhere in the ancient world.

II

As life in the fertile Nile valley was less strenuous than in most of the lands about the Mediterranean, the Egyptians took a somewhat more optimistic view of the universe than did their Asiatic and European neighbors. In the primitive nature myths of Egypt the notion of struggle is not so prominent as in the mythologies of Babylonia, Persia, or Greece; nor does the idea of an ultimate destruction of the world seem to have been native to Egyptian thinking. Nevertheless, in historical times both the burden of life's ills and the need of divine relief were recognized. In the presence of deplorable social conditions resulting from defective government, an early Egyptian prophet declares his faith in the advent of a new ruler who will save the people from their distresses. At present, normal industrial and commercial activities have ceased, justice has disappeared, blood is everywhere, and the people wander about like shepherdless sheep; but the prophet looks for the coming of a brighter day when a deliverer will arise who will rule justly and bring "cooling to the flame." When a beneficent prince appears who brings these hopes to fulfilment, he is hailed as a mediator of divine help. Merneptah, for example, is called the divinely appointed protector of Egypt who bestows upon the people in an especial

measure the favor of the great sun-god, Re. Now there is universal rejoicing in the land, all fear of enemies has been removed, lamentation has vanished, the desolated towns are repopulated, and the husbandman enjoys unmolested the fruits of his toil.¹

Religion also inculcated the idea of a struggle and of a victory to be accomplished through divine assistance. This notion was especially prominent in the popular Isis-Osiris cult which had a wide vogue, not only in Egypt itself, but all about the Mediterranean previous to, and contemporary with, the rise of Christianity. The myths of the cult tell of a fierce conflict between Osiris, the brother-husband of Isis, and a mighty foe who slays Osiris. But a restoration to life is accomplished by the efforts of Isis, and the slayer of Osiris is finally conquered. The myth really depicts the successful struggle of man against his great enemy death, which is now no longer to be feared, since the heroic divinities, Isis and Osiris, have conquered this foe and provided through the institution of their cult a sure victory for mortals. While this scheme of salvation did not include an ultimate destruction of the world, where death reigned, it did offer to every individual the hope of a blessed immortality in a new world beyond the grave.

III

Babylonian mythology depicts a primitive struggle between contending powers personifying the principles of chaos and order. The triumph of the latter under the leadership of the god Marduk has resulted in the creation of

¹ J. H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, III, 263.

the world and the appearance of mankind upon the earth. Marduk has conquered the powers of chaos, ordered the course of the stars, given shape to heaven and earth, bestowed upon the world fertility and prosperity, and now extends his mercy and compassion toward repentant sinners.¹ According to this legend a new and ideal order of things to endure forever has now been inaugurated. Even before beginning his triumphant onslaught upon the powers of chaos Marduk is hailed by his fellow-gods as savior, lord, and eternal sovereign of the whole universe:

O Marduk, thou art our avenger.
We give thee sovereignty over the entire universe.
Thou shalt preside in the assembly, thy word is supreme.
May thy weapon never become blunt; may it strike down the foe!
O lord, spare the life of him who trusts in thee
And pour out the life of the god who seized hold of evil.²

On the other hand, in the Babylonian story of the Deluge, man himself is made to participate in the struggle incident to the changing order of things. Looking down upon the world, particularly upon the metropolis Surippak on the shores of the Euphrates, the gods perceived that civilization had become effete and so they resolved to send a flood. All life would have perished had not one prudent man, Utnapishtim, been instructed to build a boat in which he saved himself, his family, and all kinds of living creatures. As a reward for his service he and his wife were transformed into

divine beings and given a special dwelling-place in a distant land "at the mouth of the streams"—apparently a hypothetical paradise near the head of the Persian Gulf. Here they enjoyed a blessed and untroubled existence, but the new lot of their descendants was less ideal. Never again would mankind be destroyed promiscuously, but disasters would fall upon evildoers, lions and leopards would be let loose to devour men, famine and pestilence would come upon the land, and mortals would suffer many ills from which there is no promise of release.

The legend of Ishtar's descent to the lower world discloses still another phase of conflict and triumph pictured by the Babylonian imagination. This mother-goddess was the personification of the vital and reproductive forces of nature. But when she descended to Hades, where she was held captive by the evil powers of the nether world, the vitality of nature waned, deadly winter spread over the land, and the complete destruction of human life seemed imminent. The danger, however, was averted through Ishtar's fortunate escape from "the house where those who enter do not return." With her release nature's vital powers revived, bringing the joys of springtime back again and insuring to mortals a fresh supply of food as well as an increase of flocks. Thus each year had its period of special distress followed by a season of hope.

The contrast between the times of distress and the age of happiness is not confined to the realm of mythology; it also appears in the annals of

¹ Morris Jastrow, Jr., in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, extra vol., pp. 567-73.

² *Ibid.*, p. 571.

Babylonian and Assyrian history. Evil days are predicted when the glory of Babylon will decline under the rule of a prince who will bring upon the people a time of unceasing warfare and slaughter. Men will devour one another, parents will barter away their children, disorders will suddenly overtake the land, the husband will desert his wife and the wife her husband, the mother will bolt the door against her daughter, and a foreign conqueror will overrun Babylonia.¹

In contrast with the prophecy of evil things during the reign of an incapable prince, other rulers are hailed as divine deliverers who inaugurate a truly Golden Age. For example, Hammurabi, king of Babylon, viewed his rule as the dawn of an ideal régime when the evils of former days had come to an end with the appearing of the new kingdom of righteousness:

When the lofty king Anu, king of Anunaki, and Bel, Lord of heaven and earth, who determines the destiny of the land, committed the rule of all mankind to Marduk, the chief son of Ea; . . . when they pronounced the lofty name of Babylon . . . and in its midst established an everlasting kingdom whose foundations are as firm as heaven and earth, at that time Anu and Bel called me, Hammurabi, the exalted prince, the worshiper of the gods, to cause justice to prevail in the land, to destroy the wicked and the evil, to prevent the strong from oppressing the weak, to go forth like the sun over the black-headed race, to enlighten the land, to further the welfare of the people. Hammurabi the governor named by Bel am I who brought about plenty and abundance . . . the lord

adorned with scepter and crown whom the wise god Ma-ma has clothed with complete power.²

Similarly in a letter addressed to the prosperous Assyrian king Asurbanipal we read:

Through their infallible oracle [the gods] Shamash and Adad have decreed the rule of my lord the king over the lands [predicting] favorable reign, days of justice, years of righteousness, copious showers, mighty freshets, favorable market prices. The gods are well disposed, fear of God is abundant, the sanctuaries are overloaded. The great gods of heaven and earth have announced regarding my lord the king: Old men will leap for joy, children will sing, joyfully will women and maidens give themselves to the duties of wife, and being delivered they will give life to sons and daughters. Animal life multiplies. My lord the king has bestowed life upon him whose sins had destined him for death. Thou hast liberated those who were many years in prison, thou hast given health to those who were a long time ill, the hungry have become satisfied, the emaciated have become fat, the naked have been clothed with garments.³

In addition to its myth-makers and its political historians, Babylonia also had its philosophers who offered their interpretation of the ever-present conflict between the world's opposing forces. The Babylonian philosopher derived his wisdom from a study of the stars, whose orderly procedure readily suggested that the universe was not the plaything of chance, but was governed by fixed laws. He who possessed adequate astral wis-

¹ From Gressmann, *Allorientalische Texte und Bilder zum Alten Testamente*, I, 75 f.

² R. F. Harper, *The Code of Hammurabi*, pp. 3 ff.

³ R. F. Harper, *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters*, Part I, No. 2 (pp. 2 f.).

dom could read these laws, and this knowledge enabled him either to interpret past history or to foretell coming events. Observation showed that changes in the position of the heavenly bodies were attended by corresponding changes in the seasons of the year, each season recurring at its appointed time. Thus the life of nature was seen to move in cycles controlled by the orderly movements of the heavens. This fact easily led the astral philosopher to assume that world-history also moved in recurring cycles. Since each year had its days of youth and its declining season of old age, so the world was supposed to pass through a series of births and deaths as the successive world-years came and went.

According to Berosus, a Babylonian priest of the third century B.C., fire and flood alternated in bringing about the end of successive world-eras. When the planets stood in a particular position, the heat of summer would become so severe that all the world would burst out in flame; and at another time, owing to the conjunction of the planets, the winter rains would descend in an overwhelming flood. Berosus was so sure of the accuracy of his observations that he assigned a definite date both for the conflagration and for the deluge.¹

The foregoing survey shows the peoples of the Tigris-Euphrates valley to have been fully conscious of the ills that threaten man's life upon the earth. Babylonian nature myths reflect a primitive age when man's subsistence was threatened by the devastations of storm and flood or by the rotation of unfavorable seasons. The victory of a

gradually evolving civilization was pictorially represented as a heroic triumph of beneficent deities. To be sure, evil had not been completely annihilated, but a new and better age had already been inaugurated. A more advanced stage of reflection appears in historical times, when the hopes of the people are fixed upon some princely deliverer whose favorable rule means millennial blessings for his subjects. Yet the savior-prince is not the ultimate source of help; he is discharging a divine commission, and his reign is beneficent because it is a kingdom of God on earth. In astral philosophy life's immediate ills and immediate blessings figure less prominently, since they are merely incidental items in a great cosmic process. The new world-year may take delight in its youth, but it is destined for decay. On the other hand, the dying world may console itself with the assurance of future renovation. While this program may offer comfort to the cosmos, it contains no consolation for the individual. Those who chanced to be alive in the days of the world's youth share temporarily in its delights, but all souls are ultimately destined for shadowy abodes where they dwell forever in joyless monotony.

IV

The Persians were keenly conscious of a sharp conflict between good and evil in the world. This struggle made a mighty appeal to their imagination, and the course of its progress was portrayed in vivid colors. Both men and divinities were thought to participate in the strife; nor would the conflict cease until the present evil world is miraculously

¹ Seneca, *Natural Questions*, iii. 29.

purged of its wickedness, cleansed by the purifying fire of a final judgment, and made the scene of a new kingdom of perfect blessedness.

The notion of a bitter warfare between the powers of light and the powers of darkness lies at the very root of all Persian thinking. At an early date old nature myths had been transformed into ideal moral struggles between the god of righteousness on the one hand and the prince of evil on the other. The world began with the good god's creative act in producing beings worthy of himself. This was followed by the counter-activity of the evil spirit, who created many demons and fiends to assist him in his malicious designs. Henceforth the conflict raged, every move made by the forces of righteousness being offset by some counter-activity on the part of the powers of wickedness. When the process of creation had advanced to the point where man emerged, he at once became the special object of demonic attack. Ever since his creation he has been a most active participant in the ceaseless moral struggle, arraying himself at will on the side of the good god or on the side of the demons. Thus the world has become a great battleground where God, his angelic assistants, the beneficent powers of nature, and righteous men are pitted against Satan, his demonic allies, malignant natural forces, and evil men.

Persian speculation divided the course of the world's history into four main periods, each embracing 3,000 years. During the first period God's creation remained in a pure spiritual state with intangible bodies which were unaffected

by the taint of evil. Then came the material creation, extending over another 3,000 years, during which the will of God was regnant. The third period was one of great distress because the Prince of Darkness now became much more aggressive and filled creation with many miseries. The fourth period, which is the present age, opened with the coming of Zoroaster, the alleged founder of the true religion, who communicated a new revelation to men and greatly strengthened their powers of resisting Satan and his hosts. After 3,000 years of this struggle have passed, the present world will come to an end. Thus the Persians held the doctrine of the great world-year, an idea which we have already encountered in Babylonia. The four trimillenniums of the Persian system together make a 12,000-year period, which evidently is one world-year of 12 months, each month covering 1,000 years, the months being grouped into four great seasons of 3,000 years each.

Legend subdivided the third of the four great trimillenniums into three different periods, each representing a distinct stage in the history of the conflict between good and evil. The first thousand years constituted a Golden Age ruled by an ideal hero, Yima the Brilliant. He is the fabled educator of the human race, who conferred the blessings of civilization upon men and guided them in the ways of fabulous prosperity. So rapidly did all good things multiply that on three successive occasions, 300 years apart, it became necessary to enlarge the earth in order to make room for the abundant life which it nourished. The glorious hero

and his beneficent rule are thus described:

Brilliant and with herds full goodly,
Of all men most rich in Glory,
Of mankind like to the sunlight,
So that in his kingdom made he
Beasts and men to be undying,
Plants and waters never drying,
Food invincible bestowing.
In the reign of valiant Yima
Neither cold nor heat was present,
Neither age nor death was present,
Neither envy, demon-founded.
Fifteen years of age in figure
Son and father walked together,
All the days of Vivanghvant's offspring
Yima ruled with herds full goodly.¹

The Golden Age is followed by a thousand years of distress when the power of the demons prevails. During this period the destructive forces of winter are let loose. The pleasant pastures which formerly had been filled with flocks and herds are now buried in snow and ice, great numbers of living creatures perish, and the death-dealing demons spread destruction everywhere. But by a special providence of the good god a remnant of life from the Golden Age is preserved and stored up in a mythical paradise where it awaits the restoration of a new ideal order of which it is both the model and the germ. As the end of Yima's reign draws near he is instructed to build an inclosure four-square and as long as a riding-ground on each side. When the structure is completed, it is to be filled with the choicest representatives of all living things gathered by pairs. Yima's instructions are:

Gather together the seed of all men and women that are the greatest and the best and the finest on this earth; gather together the seed of all kinds of cattle that are the greatest and the best and the finest on this earth; gather together the seed of all plants that are the tallest and sweetest on this earth; gather together the seed of all fruits that are the most edible and the sweetest on this earth. Bring these by pairs to be inexhaustible so long as these men shall stay in the inclosure.²

This paradise is to be kept tightly shut until the final destruction of the world's wickedness. Then the inclosure will be opened in order that the renovated earth may be fructified by the pure seed of the holy god's first creation. These traditions regarding a Golden Age and an ideal paradise are modeled after the imaginary age of future blessedness for which the struggling spirit of mankind yearned; and this idealized past served in turn as a support for faith in the final triumph of good over evil. What once had been might surely be expected again.

A long period of struggle lay between the Golden Age of mythology and the coming day of the world's final redemption. The one thousand years of darkness which set in with the removal of Yima were followed by another thousand years of struggle. During this time the forces of light made slow headway against the powers of darkness. A new stage in the struggle is marked by the appearing of Zoroaster, who was sent by God to bring the divine revelation to man, thus giving a mighty impetus to the forces of righteousness. His

¹ Yasna IX. 4 f., as cited by A. J. Carnoy in *The Mythology of All Races*, VI, 304.

² Vendidad II. 21-31, as cited by A. J. Carnoy, *op. cit.*, p. 308.

work marks the beginning of the final 3,000-year period which includes modern times and is to close with the catastrophic end of the world, when all evil will be annihilated.

The events connected with the final triumph of God were extensively elaborated by Persian fancy. Shortly before the end, the world will suffer great distress, as the Satanic powers make a last gigantic effort at self-assertion. Demonic hordes will come from the east and from the west, the people will be corrupted through the worship of idols, friends and relatives will become estranged from one another, and a large part of the nation will perish. All nature will be shaken by the shock of battle between the good spirits and the demons of darkness. Temporarily the latter are so powerful that they fill the earth with indescribable sufferings. Pestilences break out everywhere, nature ceases to be productive, rains no longer water the earth, men die of hunger, the brightness of the sun diminishes, the days become shorter, the years pass more rapidly, and the black night of Satanic darkness threatens to engulf the universe.

The terrible conditions of the last times are finally relieved by the appearance of a savior, Shoshans (Shaoshyant), who was born in a miraculous manner from Zoroaster's seed, which had been carefully preserved through the centuries by the angels. With the advent of Shoshans and his companions the resurrection of the dead takes place. Throughout the centuries the spirits of the departed had taken up their abode in heaven or in hell, according to their deserts, but now they are reunited with

their former bodies. The bones, the blood, the hair, and the vital force, which had been intrusted to the keeping of earth, water, plants, and fire, respectively, are restored, and each person rises in the place where his death had occurred. With the resurrection the power of death is completely broken. Those who were still alive when the savior appeared also share in this victory over decay and corruption. Each one partakes of the heavenly food of immortality, and never again will the spirit be separated from the body. All peoples are taught a common language, and with one voice they celebrate their triumph by rendering songs of praise to God and to the archangels.

Before the state of final blessedness is attained, judgment must be executed upon sinners, the powers of Satan must be completely crushed, and the world must undergo a process of purification and renewal. After the resurrection all men meet in a common assembly, but the contrast in appearance between the righteous and the wicked is as sharp as that between black and white sheep in the same flock. The good and evil deeds of each are made clearly manifest in the presence of the entire company, whereupon remorse and shame overtake the wicked while the righteous rejoice in their own good fortune. Then comes the separation when sinners are committed to hell for three days of torment, their terrible punishments being intensified by a clear vision of the sumptuous blessings enjoyed in the meantime by the righteous. After judgment the whole world, hell included, is purified by a baptism of fire, which causes the mountains to pour forth streams of

molten metal. This cleansing flood sweeps over all the earth, leveling hills and mountains and purging evil out of sinners, while to the righteous it is as pleasant as a bath of warm milk. Above the earth good and evil spirits fight out their final battle resulting in the complete rout of Satan and his allies. His power is forever destroyed, he himself is driven back to the lowest pit of darkness whence he originally came, and the regions of hell, now purified by the bath of molten metal, become a part of the new heaven and the new earth which are to endure eternally. Thus the curtain falls upon the last act of the great world-drama.

It is not surprising that the Persians were extremely sensitive to the presence of evil forces in their world, or that they looked to the Deity for a miraculous deliverance from their woes. Their very environment impressed upon them the seriousness of the conflict, as well as the seeming futility of their own efforts to secure a permanent victory. Nature was far from kindly in the Iranian territory. Men suffered from violent extremes of temperature, the productivity of the fields was often threatened by droughts, to overcome the natural sterility of the soil was a difficult task, beasts of prey frequently endangered the flocks of the herdsman, and robbers found easy shelter in desert places or in the fastnesses of the mountains. Persian national history is also marked by an almost perpetual struggle, not only with less formidable foes from the neighboring steppes, but with such world-powers as Assyria, Macedonia, Rome, and Islam. The preservation of both individual and national life in-

volved a constant conflict with opposing powers. Like many other peoples, the Persians looked to religion for the hope of ultimate escape from their strenuous surroundings, and mythology offered them the fantastic picture of a catastrophic end of the world. Their most famous religious teacher, Zoroaster, had championed this teaching, and apparently he had believed that the catastrophe was already imminent in his day, in the seventh century B.C. But subsequent speculation preserved the sanctity of the hope by pushing it well forward into the future, in order that history might not deny its validity, and assurance was made doubly strong by asserting that this great expectation was no mere creation of human fancy, but a truth which had been divinely revealed.

V

Among Greeks and Romans the experiences of life were so varied that the hope of a final triumph over present ills was expressed in several different ways. Fierce struggle was thought to have marked the course of the world's history from the very outset. At an early date stories were current describing the world's progress from the days of primeval chaos down to historical times, and all of these legends portray a constant conflict between hostile forces. From heaven and earth spring the Titans—gigantic personifications of the elemental forces of nature. Many a fierce battle has to be fought ere these elemental powers can be brought under the control necessary to an orderly status of civilized society. But at last Kronos, the mightiest of the Titans, is overthrown by his son Zeus, who henceforth is

revered as father of gods and men and ruler of the universe. Thus the primal forces of nature battle with one another until order emerges from chaos.

Greek mythology pictured the career of man in prehistoric times as one long conflict in which evil grew constantly stronger while man's condition became correspondingly less happy. In Hesiod's *Works and Days*, composed in the latter part of the eighth century B.C., these views find clear expression. The situation represented is a very human one. Hesiod and his brother Perses having agreed upon a division of their patrimony, Perses quickly spends his portion in fast living while Hesiod retains the homestead and prospers by cultivating the soil. After dissipating his portion of the inheritance, Perses seeks to recruit his fortunes by means of litigation. He brings suit against his brother on the ground that the original distribution had not been just, and by bribing the judges he secures possession of the property. Hesiod appeals to his brother to forsake the lawcourts and submit to the righteous judgments of Zeus. Guided by this practical motive, the poet gathers up a number of popular tales to point the moral that industry and justice are the chief virtues to be cherished in these degenerate times.

Hesiod is firmly convinced that the present world is full of evil. There is abroad in the land a spirit of strife which stirs up discord between brothers and engenders fearful wars. Both by day and by night unnumbered ills move silently and unseen among us mortals, striking down their victims at will. Because of their presence the earth is slow in yielding its increase, they pre-

pare destructive insects or blighting scourges for the growing crops, they cause all manner of diseases which rack and consume the human frame, and they have brought upon men the curse of death. The situation seems all the more hopeless since it is a direct result of the effort made by Prometheus (Forethought), the would-be friend of man, to advance the status of mortals by teaching them the use of fire. But man must learn that his only hope—if he may hope at all—lies in absolute submission to the arbitrary will of the gods and not in any attainments to be reached by human effort. From this point of view the progress of human development is downward rather than upward.

The gradual deterioration of mankind is taught again in Hesiod's description of the successive ages. At first the Olympian gods created a race of men free from all ills who lived many years without growing old, and who died at last as if merely overcome by sleep. During this Golden Age earth bore all good things spontaneously, and all men were rich both in material blessings and in divine favors. When this age was brought to a close by the will of Zeus, its men became kindly ministering spirits which veil themselves in shrouds of mist and move everywhere over the earth to direct or to succor mortals throughout all subsequent ages. Next comes the Silver Age, far inferior to the Age of Gold, but still a time of partial happiness. Ultimately the men of this time fall under the wrath of Zeus because they neglect the worship of the gods, but being a race of silver they receive a secondary position of honor beneath the earth and are known henceforth as "blessed ones."

The third age is that of Bronze, when men learn war and give themselves over to terrible strife, but presently they are dragged down ingloriously to Hades. The Age of Iron—which Hesiod regards as the present age—is most wretched of all. Now there is no respite from toil, no release from care. This state of affairs will endure until the time arrives for this age to end, for Zeus has also determined a day for the final destruction of the Age of Iron.

What will follow the Iron Age? Will the original cycle then repeat itself, bringing in the Age of Gold once more? Although the poet does not essay the rôle of prophet, yet he expresses a wish that his birth had been delayed until the cruel Age of Iron had passed. Apparently he dares to hope—perhaps even to believe—that the best is yet to be.

Greek mythology contains another legend that is instructive in the present connection. In the distant past man had been so strongly prone to wickedness that Zeus determined to devastate the earth with a flood. The destruction was complete, the righteous Deukalion and his wife alone escaping from the calamity. Instructed by an oracle, they cast behind them stones from which human beings spring; the earth itself produces plants and animals; and a new age arises when man is given a fresh opportunity to prove his mettle in the struggle against evil. Yet, on the whole, the course of development moves downward, notwithstanding temporary advances in civilization which are made possible by the assistance of heroes and demigods. These helpers of mortals give aid in founding cities, teach men to cultivate

the soil, communicate to them useful discoveries and inventions, inspire them to worthy attainments in poetry or song, and instruct them in the proper observances of religion. But even these accomplishments were not sufficient to persuade the Greek myth-maker that the present was not a degenerate age. He ceased not to look backward with longing eyes to the Golden Age of the past, or to entertain a faltering hope that those ideal days might return.

The past Golden Age was not the only model for future hopes; the mythical fate of heroes served a similar purpose. Such of these ancient worthies as had not been rewarded with a position among the gods were thought to be leading a delightful existence in the isles of the blest at the confines of the world. There they dwelt under the rule of Kronos, who had formerly held sway in heaven when the first Golden Age was upon earth. Now the blessed heroes enjoyed a partial return of primitive bliss, for three times yearly the fertile soil of the Elysian fields produced spontaneously its honey-sweet fruits. Toward these delightful regions present mortals often cast covetous eyes. Sometimes a warrior weary of strife was tempted to forsake the conflict and to sail westward in search of this earthly paradise, which legend located on certain islands in the Atlantic Ocean a thousand miles or so from the African coast.¹ In Roman times Horace² makes bold to suggest that men take this Elysian kingdom of heaven by force. He bemoans the sad condition of mortals in the present Age of Iron and bids them forsake its wretchedness, turning their eyes

¹ Plutarch *Sertorius* 8 f.

² *Epodes* 16.

toward those smiling isles of refuge where the earth yields her increase without the plowman's care. It is quite possible, however, that Horace is not advising his contemporaries to emigrate to the Islands of the Atlantic, but is metaphorically referring to Rome itself, now under the rule of Augustus, who is hailed by his admirers as the restorer of the Golden Age. At this time some Romans really believed that the millennium had dawned.

VI

Greek mythology was freely appropriated by the Romans, who in some respects took the problem of the world's evil more seriously than did the Greeks. While Roman writers were busy expounding Greek myths for Latin readers, the Roman statesman, with his remarkable aptitude for practical efficiency, undertook the task of making the blessings of the Golden Age a reality for his own day and generation. Roman political philosophy of the first century B.C. adopted the notion of successive cycles in historical evolution and saw in contemporary events evidences of the passing of a decadent age and the dawn of a new order. The closing years of the Republic had been a period of much distress which made men peculiarly conscious of life's ills and prompted strong desires for deliverance. Poets called to memory the golden days of fabulous happiness when Kronos had ruled and wars were unknown, while at present under the dominion of Zeus there was no end of war and slaughter.¹ Craze for

war was said to rest like a curse upon Rome, doomed by fate thus to bring ultimate destruction upon herself.² As early as the year 88 B.C., in connection with the terrible civil war for which Sulla was held chiefly responsible, premonitory signs had been observed which were alleged to indicate the coming of a new age. It was reported that one day out of a clear sky a trumpet had sounded mournful and terrible, presaging the advent of internal conflicts which were to bring more distress upon Rome than she had formerly suffered from all her enemies.³ Again, at Julius Caesar's funeral the alleged appearance of a wonderful star in broad daylight was taken to indicate the exit of one age and the dawn of a new era.⁴

During the period of reconstruction following the death of Julius Caesar and the gradual rise of Octavian to a position of supreme power throughout the whole Roman world, Virgil ventured to prophesy. He was not unmindful of the ills to which humanity was heir, nor did he ignore the trying experiences of the times; yet in spite of all these calamities he was distinctly optimistic. To be sure, he recognized that the husbandman often found his efforts thwarted by wild beasts, by robbers, or by floods, but in struggling against these enemies man acquired much greater skill than would otherwise have been possible. In fact, Zeus himself had let loose these hostile forces for the very purpose of encouraging humanity toward higher attainments.⁵ But in all his striving man remembered that once upon a time

¹ Tibullus i. 3.

² Horace *Epodes* 7.

³ Plutarch *Sulla* 7.

⁴ Servius on Virgil *Ecl.* iv. 46.

⁵ *Georg.* i. 121 ff.

there had been no pests, the very choicest products of nature had grown spontaneously in great abundance, and now the former Age of Gold was about to return.

Virgil based his hope upon observation and revelation. The hope of world-renewal had been suggested both by legends regarding ideal times in the past and by the notion of cycles in the revolution of the ages. The troubles of the time provided a fitting occasion for the introduction of a new order, while desire and expectancy made it easier to perceive premonitory signs of coming events. In addition to these immediate incentives, the Sibylline books—the “bible” of Roman religion—had also revealed the approach of a new era. Under the inspiration of all these authorities Virgil uttered his famous prophecy of the impending Roman “millennium”:

The last age prophesied by the Sibyl is come and the great series of ages begins anew. Justice now returns, Saturn reigns once more, and a new progeny is sent down from high heaven. O chaste Lucina, be thou propitious to the infant boy under whom first the iron age shall cease and the golden age over all the world arise. Now thine own Apollo reigns. While thou too, Pollio, while thou art consul, this glory of our age shall dawn and the great months begin to roll. Under thy rule all vestiges of our guilt shall disappear, releasing the earth from fear forever. He [the new-born child] shall partake of the life of the gods, he shall see heroes mingling with gods, and be seen by them, and he shall bring peace to the world, ruling it with his father's might. On thee, O child, the earth, as her first offerings, shall pour forth everywhere without culture creeping ivy with lady's

glove, and Egyptian beans with smiling acanthus intermixed. The goats of themselves shall convey homeward their udders distended with milk, nor shall the herds dread monstrous lions. Thy very cradle shall blossom with attractive flowers. The serpent shall perish and the secret-poison plant shall disappear; the Assyrian balm shall grow in every field. But as soon as thou shalt be able to read the praises of heroes and the achievements of thy sire, and to know what virtue is, the field shall by degrees grow yellow with ripening corn, blushing grapes shall hang on the rude brambles, and hard oaks shall drip with dewy honey. . . . Dear offspring of the gods, mighty seed of Jove, enter thy great heritage, for the time is now at hand. See how the world's massive dome bows before thee—earth and oceans and the vault of heaven. See how all things rejoice at the approach of this age. Oh, that my last stage of life may continue so long and so much breath be given me as shall suffice to sing thy deeds!

This politico-religious faith of the Romans was still further strengthened by the success of Augustus in establishing order throughout the Empire. When Virgil had delivered his messianic prophecy in the year 40 B.C., he did not specifically name the divine child who was to prove himself savior of the world. But later, when composing the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, the poet was able to point to Augustus as the promised deliverer who is “to establish again the Golden Age in Latium, through those lands where Saturn reigned of old.”¹

Faith in the saving mission of Augustus is not the peculiar possession of the literary men of the Imperial court; it is also a widespread belief among the

¹ *Aeneid* vi. 788 ff.

populace, particularly in the eastern portion of the Empire. In these regions it had been customary for centuries to regard a beneficent prince as a saving minister of Deity. In Greece, Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt powerful generals and other potentates had often been hailed as deliverers from ill, and the blessings which their rule conferred upon their subjects were esteemed as divine gifts. But at no period in the memory of man had the stability of life in the Mediterranean world been more secure than under the kindly rule of Augustus. These new conditions, in contrast with the wretchedness of the preceding period, led naturally to most extravagant praise of the emperor. Surely his advent had brought an end to the Age of Iron, and now the process of world-renewal had begun. Accordingly Augustus' subjects inscribed memorials to him in which they expressed a belief that Providence had now fulfilled all the prayers of mankind, "for earth and sea have peace; cities flourish well governed, harmonious, and prosperous; the course of all good things has reached a climax, and all mankind has been filled with good hopes for the future and good cheer for the present."

The final revelation of divine favor for mortals had now been granted in the person and work of Augustus, whom Providence "filled with virtue for the benefit of mankind, sending him to be a savior for us as well as for our descendants, bringing all wars to an end, and setting up all things in order." By his coming he has not only fulfilled all past hopes and excelled all previous benefactors, but he has left to future generations no possibility of surpassing him.

In short, when he was born the dawn of the Golden Age began. Such was the popular faith of many of Augustus' subjects.

VII

While mythological fancy and political theory were making their contributions toward the shaping of Graeco-Roman "millennial" hopes, the more distinctly religious movements of the time were also exerting a distinct influence upon the future hopes of the masses. Most important of all were the so-called mystery-cults, which had become generally known about the Mediterranean before the beginning of the Christian era. The tendency of these religions was to turn men's minds away from the notion of world-salvation and to center attention upon the salvation of the individual. Yet the myths and rites of these cults reflected the idea of a mighty conflict in this world. Moreover, the conflict was thought to affect, not only the present welfare of man, but also the fate of his immortal soul. Each cult offered its devotees the hope of an ultimate victory over the world's hostile powers. The myths described how legendary divinities had warded off from mankind the terrors of winter, having procured, by means of their own descent to the lower world, power to revive the life of nature in the spring-time and bless mortals with an abundance of summer fruits. In historical times these material blessings were used to symbolize a victory for the souls of deceased mortals. As the divine hero of the cult had descended to the nether regions and returned triumphant, so the soul of his worshipper would be liberated from the shades below and transported

to regions of eternal blessedness. Although belief in individual immortality offers escape from, rather than a solution of, the present world's ills, yet the picture of future blessedness described in the mysteries provided suggestive imagery for those who wished to portray the glories of a returning Golden Age upon earth.

The Graeco-Roman philosophers also struggled with the problem of the world's evil and proposed solutions for its removal. The ideal republic proposed by Plato was to be a utopia of man's own making, but popular notions influenced very perceptibly the details of the scheme. This new model society was really a replica of the Golden Age of mythology with the more fanciful features and the primary activities of the gods omitted. But Plato's state was not to endure forever; it also was subject to the universal law of change and decay. First came the world-year during which humanity was upon the ascent, this development culminating in the realization of the ideal social order which Plato's imagination reared for itself. Then another world-year sets in marked by a gradual process of decline. These two alternating ages will follow one another as long as the universe endures, each part of each cycle reappearing at its appointed time. Since the human body and the immortal soul are items in the process, man may ever rest assured that some day in the more or less distant future the Golden Age will return, when all souls and all bodies will be temporarily reunited under perfectly ideal conditions.

In the case of Epicureanism its rigid materialism and its emphatic denial

that the gods concerned themselves at all with the present world left room for human activity only in combating the ills to which flesh is heir. The Epicureans neither permitted themselves to follow mythological fancies nor did they indulge in idealistic flights of imagination, after the Platonic fashion. They scorned the popular belief that the history of mankind had been one long process of degeneration; on the contrary, they pictured it as a gradual rise in the arts of civilization. This process produced its pains and its pleasures, but the latter would predominate if man would only learn to live each day wisely and well, eliminating from his mind all traditional religious notions. The greatest curse on mortals was their inherited fear of the gods and their dread of death, both notions being wholly erroneous according to Epicurean teaching. Since the soul did not survive the body, death was not to be feared, and since the gods had absolutely no part in the affairs of man, present evils belonged to the strictly human sphere. Under these circumstances conditions could be bettered only through the activity of better men in the present age.

The most influential school of philosophy in the early Roman Empire was that of the Stoics. Their ideas regarding the present world-struggle and its outcome are composite in character. Stoicism retained the traditional picture of an ideal past when mankind lived free from care and pleasing to God. Man's fall from this ideal state is ascribed to his own acts. At first he remained close to nature and was a tiller of the soil; he was an utter stranger to

city life with its greed for gain and the consequent strife arising between men and nations. Ascent in civilization so called had really meant decline in happiness and morals. When the first sword was forged and the first ship built, man started upon that downward course which ultimately plunged him into wars, led him to undertake perilous journeys upon the sea, and engendered every form of jealousy, hatred, passion, and vice.

The only way of escape from the evils of modern decadent times was said to be a return to the simple life of nature. The Stoic preacher strenuously urged his contemporaries to apply this panacea for the healing of their own personal ills. They were personally responsible for the outcome of this effort, but the success of the struggle was partially guaranteed by the presence in their lives of a divine power—an inherent spark of deity—which God had placed in every man's breast at birth. The hope of humanity lay in living true to the inward light. This ideal, if pursued, would result in the suppression of present evil, the purification of the world, and a life of ideal happiness.

If this program could have been carried out, man might have been able to inaugurate his own "millennium." But the Stoic did not really believe that this ideal was capable of full realization under present conditions. The goal was not to be reached by an evolutionary process slowly leading back to primitive ideal conditions; on the contrary, it was to be attained by means of a cosmic catastrophe which would resolve the present world into its primal constituent elements, from which there would arise

a new world where the Age of Gold would be restored.

Since Stoic teachers adopted the theory of cosmic cycles, their new world would not retain its perfection eternally. The same forces of deterioration that had wrought havoc in the past would again appear. Although everything had been newly created in innocence in order that no remnant might be left to tutor men in vice, yet the new race would soon decline. As Seneca dolefully remarks, vice quickly creeps in, while virtue is difficult to find; she needs a ruler and a guide, but vice can be acquired without a tutor.¹ Hence Stoic philosophy offered at best only a temporary release from evil—a release to be partially attained by the individual through his own efforts in living true to nature, and to be exhibited from time to time in the eternal cosmic process which periodically brought about world-dissolution and world-renewal.

Our survey of gentile efforts at solving the problem of the world's destiny and man's relation to the ills of life shows how generally the ancients depreciated the significance of their own times. There is a prevalent tendency to trust almost exclusively in special supernatural intervention for the hope of deliverance from evil. Even when the hope seems on the point of realization under some beneficent ruler, he is given supernatural credentials as a means of guaranteeing his validity. Where direct supernatural aid is rejected, reliance is placed upon the arbitrary workings of a superior cosmic process, and thus the significance of the human struggle is virtually denied.

¹ *Natural Questions* iii. 30. 7.